



PHIL NIJHUIS / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza says Canada wants “to create the conditions in order to attack Venezuela, to invade Venezuela.”

Venezuela blames Canada for country's collapse

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OTTAWA • Venezuela is staggering in the face of a years-long power struggle, food shortages, hyperinflation and an exodus of its citizens.

The country's foreign minister says, Blame Canada.

Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza is part of Nicolas Maduro's government, which most Western countries no longer recognize, but it does still control most of the country's institutions.

He was speaking through Zoom to a Canadian audience on Thursday, in an event organized by the left-leaning Canadian Foreign Policy Institute.

Canada and most other Western nations have backed Juan Guaidó, a former member of the country's national assembly who declared himself the interim president in 2019 after Maduro's re-election in what some say was a fraudulent vote.

In 2017, Canada helped to form the Lima Group, a group of countries, including most of the major countries in North and South America, to call for Maduro to step down and for free elections to be held in the country.

In a lengthy speech Thursday, Arreaza said the Canadian government was attempting to undermine Venezuela to take the nation's wealth.

"Canada has been in the centre of these events and this means that they want to create the conditions in order to attack Venezuela, to invade Venezuela, because they want to take control of our country and its wealth."

The Lima Group specifically rules out any type of violence or force as a means to change government in Venezuela.

The U.S. is not a member of the group, but has said it supports its aims.

Arreaza accused the group of

being nothing more than a front for U.S. action.

"No one is going to give any credibility to this group, because they will believe that it is the United States with its regime-change policy trying to attack Venezuela."

Most observers believe the Maduro government's policies are to blame for the economic crisis hitting the country that has led to food shortages, mass unemployment and a complete collapse of the country's currency. There have been several large protests in the streets, which the government has met with force. Millions of Venezuelans have also fled the country.

Arreaza said Canada's push for a change in government and the economic sanctions the country faces are the cause of the country's problems.

"We have a high inflation level

“THEY WANT TO TAKE CONTROL OF OUR COUNTRY AND ITS WEALTH.”

because of the disturbances in our economy. We are threatened with invasions," he said.

"How could you expect not to have economic migration?"

In addition to Lima Group members, most European nations and other democracies have denounced the Maduro regime. Arreaza said his government is not concerned about what the leaders of other countries have to say about Venezuela.

"We go forward with the support of our people. The only actor in this world that has to recognize

the Venezuelan institutions is the Venezuelan people."

Canada's foreign minister, François-Philippe Champagne, was unavailable for an interview Friday, but he met with Guaidó earlier this year and called for change in Venezuela.

His press secretary, Syrine Khoury, said the government still hopes to work through the Lima Group to bring about a change in government.

"Canada is firmly committed to working through the Lima Group to address the situation in Venezuela, supporting efforts toward a peaceful return to democracy, protection of human rights and rule of law."

Khoury rejected any suggestion Canada was threatening Venezuela, arguing Ottawa wants only to see a return to a democratic process.

"Canada believes that a peaceful political solution is needed more than ever and we remain fully committed to continuing to support efforts to that end," she said.

"Canada has been actively working to strengthen the collaboration of the international community on our shared goal of seeing the return to democracy in Venezuela through a political process leading to free and fair elections, as soon as possible."

She said the government continues to be disappointed in the Maduro government.

"Canada strongly condemns the systematic attacks by the illegitimate Maduro regime against Venezuela's democracy and people through its attempts to undermine Venezuela's democratic institutions and democratic opposition," she said.

"These attacks have only increased leading up to the legislative elections scheduled to take place before the end of 2020."

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